

Bad Memories by OTTSTF

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Summary:

Memories can be great.

So many happy moments to reflect on over your life. Moments shared with your friends, your family. Moments that put a huge smile on your face as you recall them.

But there are bad memories too. And they can be summoned just as easily with a single word.

Bad Memories

Author's Note:

So this story came to me at 2AM in the morning after reading "Everythings Wrong With Me!" by [CrepefilledBungolos](#), so thank you very much to them for that story!

Memories can be great.

They can be of your favourite moments, like crossing paths with Mike (and the others) in the woods. Being given his coat, taken to his house, being fed and treated like a human, rather than a lab rat. Being given a name that isn't a simple number, with the choice of whether to accept it or not. The ability to be yourself around your friends, who accept you for who you are, not what you can do. Not being shamed for your lack of common knowledge, but having new words and concepts explained to you, quick and simple, without question.

Feeling comfortable as you lean against Mike after exhausting yourself to find a friend, or after dancing to two songs in a row.

The snowball. That's a favourite memory, and it probably will always be. Walking in to the room full of people, feeling overwhelmed for a brief moment before seeing him, staring directly back at you. The overwhelming rush of heat towards your cheeks as he calls you beautiful, before asking you to dance. The satisfying knowledge that you aren't alone in not knowing something, but being able to learn with your favourite person.

Sharing a kiss with that favourite person.

Yes. So many memories can be fantastic. Most people may say the majority of memories are good, drowning out the bad ones effortlessly.

But it can be very easy to bring one of those bad memories to the surface. And with one memory, can come many others, in a huge chain reaction that sends you spiralling out of control.

That is what just happened.

The party are crowded in the Wheeler basement, as per usual, with

everyone arguing over what movie to watch, bar El and Max, who sit back on the sofa together, laughing at their friends as their discussion becomes more heated by the second.

Ghost Busters? We've watched that thousands of times.

Poltergeist? That's far too generic.

Back to the Future? We've watched that more times than the Earth has orbited the sun.

E.T.? Why watch a telekinetic alien when we have a telekinetic of our own?

It's that argument that heats Mike immediately. Dustin makes the comparison. El herself doesn't mind at all, but Mike immediately becomes angered by it.

"Jesus Christ, Dustin, is that all you care about? You know the rule: no mentioning of El's abilities, even when alone." Mike reminds him.

"Dude, why? She's literally a superhero yet we're supposed to act like there's nothing special about her." Dustin remarks.

"Because that's what she wants! To be normal! That's a bit hard if she's got you reminding her of her differences every single minute!"

"Dude, that's exaggerating!"

"Mike, it's okay." she tries, grabbing his arm.

"No, El, it's not okay. I hate how he tries to keep doing this, even though he knows I absolutely hate it!"

"Mike, even she's okay with it. She uses her powers all the time anyway; why are you so against them?" Dustin questions.

"I'm not against her powers! I'm against you acting like you only care about her for them!"

"You know that's not true!" Dustin immediately retaliates.

"And anyway, why would you even make that comparison? Why would you jump from E.T. to El like that? It just makes it sound like you think she's an alien. God, what's wrong with you?"

And there, we have the words that triggered this sudden flashback of bad memories.

"What is wrong with you!?" she hears Mike's voice blast in her head, directed at her. It repeats, overpowering the still arguing voices of Mike and Dustin.

("Dude, I never compared her to E.T. at all!" - "Well it damn well seemed like it!")

She can't focus on anything but the memories. How she'd flung Lucas off of Mike as they'd fought over her. How he'd hit his head against

the wall hard enough to cause bleeding. But repeated, over and over, is the look on Mike's face as he'd turned to her. "What is wrong with you!?" he shouts, immediately turning back to Lucas.

She hadn't meant to push Lucas that hard. Just enough to separate them was what she was after, but that describes her in a nutshell, as far as she's concerned: out of control. She hadn't known how to limit herself. She'd just thought of Mike – or herself, considering she didn't want Mike getting hurt – and had pushed Lucas without second thought.

As she thinks about it, she realises that this describes everything that's ever happened ever since she'd broken out of the lab. She's caused the Demogorgon's release into the world. She'd caused Will's week of suffering. She'd nearly killed him. She has killed people, she recalls. Not just the bad people. Those people deserved it; they wanted to hurt her and her friends. But no, she's killed others, too.

Bob, because he was a superhero of his own to save everyone from the lab. He'd fallen victim to the Demo-Dogs just before he could escape the building himself. If she hadn't opened the gate, those Demo-Dogs would have never gotten to this world. Bob would still be alive.

Barbara. She'd fallen victim to the Demogorgon at Steve's house. If she hadn't opened the gate, the Demogorgon would never have found its way to this world. It never would've found Barbara; it never would've taken her. She'd still be alive. Nancy would still have her best friend.

Benny. If she'd not escaped, if she hadn't found his place, he wouldn't have been shot. He was shot because he knew El. He'd protected her, let her stay whilst he waited for 'social services' as he'd called them. But instead, the bad men, and she, showed up. He got shot twice in the chest because she'd showed up and had eaten some food.

But deaths aren't all she's caused. She caused Will's first week of suffering, and furthermore his year of 'now-memories' before total possession. It was her fault that the Mind Flayer could use Will against her friends, to find and hurt them. If Will was never taken to the Upside-Down, he'd never have been used like Barbara was. He wouldn't have had thrown up a baby Demo-Dog. That Demo-Dog would never have eaten Mews, it never would've caused the now-memory that triggered Will's possession.

None of the Upside-Down would have ever found its way to our

world if I had never escaped the lab.

The thoughts overwhelm El quickly. Her eyes are filled with tears. She suddenly snaps back to the room, hearing her two friends still arguing, over her.

She stands, and walks, fast, towards the basement stairs. She ignores Mike calling her name as she stomps upwards, heading straight for the bathroom. She needs to rinse her face out, she wants to clear her mind of the bad thoughts, but she knows she won't be able to. It's her fault. All of it is her fault.

The bathroom door slams behind her telekinetically as she sits herself on the lid of the toilet, sobbing into her palms with no end to her tears in sight.

"El?" Mike had called her name softly as she'd began stomping her way to the stairs.

"Oh my god." he'd whispered as he'd caught a glimpse of her face as she began climbing them.

"Thanks, Dustin. Thanks a lot." he'd retorted as he'd jumped to his feet to follow her.

"Hey, I-" Dustin had shouted after him, cutting himself off realising its pointlessness. "Ah, shit."

"El?" he knocks the bathroom door softly.

"Go away, Mike, please." she insists immediately.

"El, I know what I've done wrong. I know what I said. Please, let me apologise." he already sounds like he's on the verge of begging.

"It's not you." she informs him.

"Wh-What's wrong then?" he asks.

"Me." she states. "Everything is wrong with me."

He feels his gut sink. "No, no, El. Please don't say that. That's not true."

She doesn't respond.

"El, please, let me in. It's just me, I promise."

Still, no response.

"I'm going to sit against this door and sob myself to sleep until you come out." he informs her, knowing full well he means it.

She bits her lip. Mike. Always trying to be the best he can. Always trying to make things perfect for me. Always coming to the rescue. She commands the door's lock to open, although she doesn't move a muscle. She leaves her face in her palms as her arms dig into her knees.

Mike opens the door slowly, peeking his head in. The sight of her, sat on the toilet seat with her head in her hands, crying enough to fill a river, breaks his heart immediately. He opens the door the rest of the way, walking in, before closing and locking it behind himself.

"El?" he tries, walking up to her. She doesn't respond.

He kneels in front of her, placing his hands onto her knees.

"We don't have to talk now, but I'm here. I'll stay here for as long as you need." he tells her.

She sniffles, removing her hands from her face for a brief moment to look at him knelt in front of her. His face is that of worry, and his eyes are beginning to show that he's got tears of his own.

"Hey." he smiles slightly as she glances at him. She wants to smile back, but fails. More tears, more sobs begin to emerge as she sees his face. Always so forgiving, always so understanding. Always so good. He doesn't deserve the pain she causes.

He feels his heart shatter into a billion more pieces as she breaks down again. Instinctively, he raises up to snake an arm over her shoulder.

"Can we go sit on my bed? Please? I'll lock the door. The others are still in the basement, I promise."

Her immediate intention is to refuse. I don't deserve the comfort of a bed. I don't deserve your comforting. She complies, however, slowly raising to her feet, nodding her head.

"Thank you." he says simply as he begins leading her to his bed slowly.

"El, nothing is wrong with you. I promise." he says as they sit down.

"Friends don't lie." she reminds him.

"El, I'm-

"It's all my fault, Mike!" she exclaims. "Bob? Barbara? Benny?"

Mike immediately understands where she's going with this after hearing those names.

"They're all dead because of me, Mike!"

"Hey, no. No, no, no-

"None of the Upside-Down would've happened if it weren't for me! If I didn't escape, Will would never have gone missing. Barbara wouldn't have been taken, and nobody would've died!"

"El, please, you know none of it's your fault. It's Brenner's fault. Brenner and his bunch of clowns." he starts. His confidence raises as she shows a hint of a nod.

"And remember what we all said? Even Will?" she shakes her head, unable to think of what he's referring to.

"We'd all much rather go through the Upside-Down again, than never meet you." he reminds her. "Because you're such an awesome person, El. We all think so."

"No." he follows. "We know so. I would live in the Upside-Down for as long as I needed to, as long as it meant I could come out to see you."

She smiles slightly at his words.

"I mean it, El! I'd literally do anything if it meant I could stay with you forever."

She nods her head, still smiling, as she wipes her eyes onto her sleeve.

"Me too." she informs him.

He smiles back.

"Just remember all the good things you've done, El." Mike begins.

"You've saved my life five times. Five times, El. The cliff, the van, the Demogorgon, at the Byers', and by closing the gate." he lists off.

"You've saved everyone else here twice, starting from the Byers. And then the gate, that's you saving the entire world. Everyone would be dead if it weren't for you being so selfless."

She smiles. "Selfless." she copies.

"Yes, that's you. You put everyone else before yourself, even when you have no idea how dangerous it might be. You didn't know the Demogorgon would take you to the Upside-Down, but you still killed it. You knew the gate would tire you completely, but you still closed it. El, no matter what anyone tells you, or what you think of yourself, you are absolutely freaking amazing. You're literally our hero, El. You always will be."

She smiles greatly now. She lets out a sob, although this one isn't of sadness; it's of happiness. She throws her arms around him, launching herself into his side. He immediately wraps her in his arms, leaning his head against hers as she leans her cheek against his

shoulder.

Without even thinking about it, he places a kiss into her hair, surprising himself in the process. She raises her head and their eyes lock. They remain still for a brief moment, before El leans in to place a kiss on his cheek.

“I love you, Mike.”

The world may as well pause right there. He heard the words loop in his head sixty times in one second. I love you, Mike. Did she really just say that? Holy freaking shit.

“You... you love me?”

She huffs a small laugh, before connecting her lips with his, quite literally as a statement. He’s stiff at first, but he quickly loosens up, falling into the kiss himself. They linger, for five, maybe ten seconds? Neither of them are really sure, but as she pulls back, she locks her eyes with his once again. The look on his face is absolutely priceless.

“Yes. I love you.”

“I...” he tries, stumbling immediately.

“God, I love you too, El.” he finally gets out.

“I love you so freaking much.”

Both of their smiles practically want to eject off their faces. They lean into each-other for a moment again, heads on shoulders as they just take each-other in, not wanting to let go.

Minutes pass, likely, before they manage to separate.

“We should probably go downstairs. I bet they’re all starting to get suspicious of us being up here for so long.” Mike states.

“Why would they be suspicious?” she asks innocently, immediately flicking the switch for Mike’s cheeks to the “on” position.

“Uh...” he ducks his head in shyness. “I’ll explain another time. It doesn’t matter.”

She’s confused, but nods her head anyway, happy to just return to the basement to hopefully watch something, assuming they can decide between them.

Nobody says a word as they return to the basement. They all simply smile in their direction, welcoming them back to the dysfunctional family that they are.

“Can we watch E.T.?” El breaks the silence, looking directly at Dustin as she asks; the question planting a huge smirk on Dustin’s face immediately.

“Yes, m'lady, we sure can.”

Author's Note:

Thank you very much for reading, as always ♥

Feedback is a writer's drug. If you've got the time, please drop some feedback